

## **Opening Statement on Udall Amendment to H.R. 6, the Energy Bill**

Mr. Chairman:

- I would first like to thank the Rules Committee for making my amendment in order.
- My amendment strikes Section 631 of this legislation. Section 631 is typical of this flawed, shortsighted energy bill—which does not give us a national energy policy and does not help consumers with high gas prices
- Section 631 is a \$30 million dollar giveaway to a dangerous uranium mining technology. It is unsound fiscal policy for an unproven type of mining.
- Furthermore, this \$30 million dollar giveaway will encourage a company to pollute the groundwater of a community of 10,000 Navajo Indians.
- At its worst, this section targets a minority community with a dangerous technology—and uses them in an experiment.
- At its best—it is an unwarranted giveaway to the uranium mining industry.
- The Navajo Community in my district has suffered enough from the effects of uranium mining. Hundreds of families have lost their loved ones and breadwinners to the scourge of uranium mining.
- Just yesterday, the Navajo Nation Council passed the Dine Natural Resources Protection Act of 2005, placing a ban on uranium mining and uranium processing on Navajo lands. They have sent a clear message that they do NOT want this mining on their land.
- During the 1940's through the 1970's Navajo men mined uranium in dirty mines with high levels of radon. As a result, many contracted lung cancer. The Navajo Nation has seen an epidemic of lung cancer caused by uranium mining.
- The Navajos have been fighting this kind of uranium mining on their land for over ten years, and for good reason. One company has proposed leaching uranium from the Westwater Canyon Aquifer, which provides high-quality groundwater to municipal wells on the Navajo Nation. 15,000 residents depend on that aquifer, which is their sole source of drinking water.
- The people of the Navajo Nation, and the residents of Crownpoint and Church Rock, do not want this mining to occur near their groundwater. They have suffered enough.

- This proposed subsidy also will lead to even further unsound fiscal policy. At a time of skyrocketing federal deficits, and an uncertain economic future, we should not be giving away \$30 million to the uranium industry. We have too many priorities that are not being met because of policies like this subsidy. Even the group, Taxpayers for Common Sense views this as an unfair corporate give-away.
- We do not need more of this type of uranium development. Promoting this type of development does not safely provide new energy sources. Instead, it increases the potential for drastically harming the environment and causing potential harm to thousands.
- I have here a memo from CRS that reads, “The proposed statutory language (Section 631) does not appear to prohibit precisely the same sorts of projects envisioned by section 631 from occurring within New Mexico...This statute (Section 631) even appears to permit the Department of Energy to fund these types of programs in New Mexico, so long as there are alternative available sources of federal funding that can be utilized.”
- Also, funds are fungible. This \$30 million could free up funds committed elsewhere. A company can use the now freed-up money to mine in New Mexico. Thus, this subsidy could indirectly facilitate uranium mining in Navajo communities.
- However, this has broader implications than just for my state. We should not be experimenting in communities’ water anywhere. My amendment protects all communities near uranium mines from potentially having their water supplies polluted.
- While proponents of in-situ leaching contend that this type of mining poses a low risk to groundwater contamination, the fact remains that the technology is unproven and environment restoration is inconclusive.
- Companies using in-situ leach mining have had great difficulty restoring contaminated groundwater to pre-mining, baseline conditions without regulatory intervention to relax restoration standards. Restoration has taken longer than expected and cost far more than originally estimated.
- While the *aim* may be to make mining safer, there is NO proof that it will. Under the plan of the company trying to mine uranium on the Navajo reservation as we speak, levels of uranium would be increased up to 100,000 times in the portion of the aquifer where the mining takes place.
- Residual levels of uranium after mining ceases would be nearly 15 times greater than the federal drinking water standard. Such high levels of uranium could reach town wells in a few short years.

- Mr. Chairman, the case for my amendment is strong.
- This is corporate welfare pure and simple. It is an unwise use of taxpayer dollars and dangerous to my constituents on top of that.
- My amendment can prevent potential damage this provision can inflict on the health of thousands of Native Americans.
- But as I stated earlier, this provision has implications for far more communities than just the one in my district.
- The potential long-term damage this section could inflict on the environment is also immeasurable.
- I ask my colleagues to take a close look at this and consider whether or not they would want this dangerous type of mining occurring in the neighborhoods of their constituents.
- I urge my colleagues to support my amendment, stop corporate welfare, help protect the health of Native Americans, and help protect the environment.
- In closing, I ask unanimous consent to include this list of organizations that are supporting my amendment to demonstrate the broad support we've received from both New Mexico and nationally.
- Thank you, Mr. Chairman.